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MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION.

What can we do by our Votes for the good of the Schools?

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This question is often asked, both by women who are indifferent to their newly-gained power, and do not care to exercise it, and by those who are earnestly inquiring as to their duty in the matter. And to their question is often added the statement "in our town we always have a good School-committee, elected by the votes of the men; so our votes are not needed; — and — why should we vote?"

To all these questioners we would like to offer some suggestions that seem to us of weight.

1. There are in Massachusetts two orders of schools; good schools and bad schools; with every degree of variation from very bad to exceedingly good.

2. If you live in a town in which the schools are in the main below the average, there seems hardly room to doubt that by your vote you may do something towards their improvement. For your schools are poor either because your committee is not equal to the work of making them good, or because the public sentiment of your town will not sustain the committee in efforts to improve them. The women of a town help to make public sentiment just as truly as do the men, and are just as responsible for whatever

may be wrong in it, if they do not use their influence to make it what it should be. If this right public sentiment be lacking in your town, you, by your vote, and by the interest and intelligence which your vote represents, may directly contribute to the formation of a better feeling, which will demand improvement in the Schools. If your committee be incompetent, it needs no word of ours to show that, by the votes of the citizens, they must be supplanted by the right persons, before you can possibly have good schools.

3. But if you live in one of the fortunate towns, where the schools are good, "why is your vote needed" you ask, and we reply,— first, no schools are as good as they should be, as good as they may and will be when all the citizens are public-spirited enough to desire to keep them among the best by steady progress; for in education as elsewhere improvements are constantly made, old errors are discovered and removed, and new and better methods are invented. Eternal vigilance on the part of the citizens, is the price of schools that shall be always good, that shall keep up to the standard, which is always rising with the progress of civilization. And again, we reply, that if you have a good committee its members deserve the recognition that comes from the votes of their fellow-citizens. It is little that can be done to reward faithful school-committee members for services that are always responsible, and often very difficult and trying. Are they not entitled to an election by a large vote, and will they not render heartier service if they are sure that they have the grateful recognition of the women of their town, as well as of the men? Sure that they will have genuine sympathy in their efforts to improve the schools? And will it do them any harm to know that the watchful eyes of the women are upon the schools, these

homes of our children, which are hardly second in their influence to the special homes, in which we gather our little ones around our own hearthstones? And we say still further that your teachers are also entitled to a recognition on the part of all the inhabitants of the town. To get rid of bad teachers is an obvious necessity; but this is not the chief need in this direction. There are in all our towns young teachers, who have good ability, perhaps, and fair training, who in the end will doubtless make first-rate teachers, but who have yet to gain experience, which is of the utmost importance in their work. The women of the town have it in their power to be a great strength and support to such teachers as these. If you are ready to vote in school matters, you will doubtless find a way to speak the friendly word, to do the kindly deed, for the teacher who needs it. It may be a word of praise, or of criticism, a suggestion of new expedients to be tried in governing the unruly, in influencing for good those who are on the wrong track, who have no good influences surrounding them in their homes.

If the women of your town would only accept an interest in the schools as one of their duties and high privileges, the way would soon open for them to be of real service in these directions. And one thing further let us say, no good, earnest, successful teacher can ever be paid by the salary alone, any more than a mother can be paid for love and devotion towards her child. Add to the money payment, a grateful appreciation of your teachers' work, and you will lighten many a burden that weighs heavily upon every one who elevates the profession of teaching to the place where it alone belongs. Those of you who have been teachers, know how much better service could be given, if there were in the community at least

an appreciation of the fact that the life of a faithful teacher is not spent in wandering beside still waters in shady groves; but is the daily climbing of somewhat rugged mountain paths, where stones and briars are often found.

In this slight sketch of the value of your vote to the schools, we have purposely left to the last, our word in reference to the importance to the community that the schools should be good. And perhaps it would be as well to leave it all unsaid. What woman is there, who may not understand it, if she will but give it her serious thought? The minds and the characters,—to say nothing of the physical life,—of the children of our good old State, are shaped in the schools; which are indeed prime sources of good or evil in the community, making, to a large extent the mental and moral atmosphere in which we all must live. The women of the State have the power to help in making the schools good; uniting with the best men, they will have an overwhelming power in this direction.

These two facts, women of Massachusetts, speak for themselves. To us it looks as if no public-spirited, high-minded woman, reflecting upon the matter could fail to see the duty and the advantage of her casting a vote for the schools; it is a small service to offer, it will surely bring an ample return.

The Massachusetts School Suffrage Association was formed to make the votes of women as effective as possible in improving the schools. Already much has been gained in this direction by the united efforts of women throughout the State. But very much more remains to be done, which can only be accomplished by the union of all. To secure this, organization seems necessary; and we ask your kind consideration of the following plan, and your help in carrying it out.

We earnestly desire to organize in each city and town of the Commonwealth, local associations auxiliary to the State Associations. In order to attain the object of the State Society, it is necessary to have an interested company of *registered and voting* women in each city and town, pledged to awaken interest in the schools, and to arouse women to their special suffrage *duties* towards public education. These local associations should become members of the State Association, corresponding with it and reporting progress.

We would suggest the following plan for forming local organizations: That you, alone, or in coöperation with a few friends, should call a parlor meeting at some centrally-situated house, inviting all the women who voted at the last election, and any others interested. Organize by choice of a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and one or more Directors. Agree to hold meetings once every month, in the afternoon or evening, as is most convenient. Draw up a plan for these meetings, as, for instance, reading, informal discussions, or addresses from persons well informed on some of the following subjects, or others which may suggest themselves.

1. The moral condition of the schools in your city or town.

2. The sanitary condition of the schools.

3. The best course of study to be pursued.

4. How should recesses be spent?

5. Ought High-School instruction to be free?

6. What can be done to keep the children of factory or shop workers longer in school?

7. The relation between parents and teachers.

8. How much stillness in the school room should be required of Primary children?

9. Should inexperienced teachers be put in the lower grade schools?

10. Kindergarten training.

11. Necessary qualifications for teaching.

12. Necessary qualifications for school committees or school superintendents.

13. Proper use of public money in education, — taking up the question of salaries of teachers, expenses of school buildings, furnishings, etc., etc.

14. The need of women on school boards.

These, and many other problems, will open as you begin to deal with them.

The best informed among you will be able, without difficulty, to find books and pamphlets on the topics selected.

The subject of each meeting should be chosen at the preceding meeting, and two persons appointed, one to canvass the town, and make a report of the local condition in respect to the subject in hand, and the other, to get light from books or persons, in respect to the ideal condition.

It would be well to call this local association the "Educational Club," or "Public School Association," which would invite attendance from women not yet interested to vote on school matters, and from men also.

The objects of this local association should be:

1st. To awaken interest in the schools and to acquire actual knowledge of their method of instruction and the condition of the children.

2d. To arouse men and women to the importance of conscientious and wisely-directed oversight of the schools by the public, to be exercised through the ballot in the choice of school officials.

Will you take as prompt and effective measures as possible to carry out this or some other plan of local work in connection with the Massachusetts School Suffrage Association? If not able to work personally, will you secure some other helper? Please report a *beginning* as soon as possible.

We have taken it for granted that, in every town of the Commonwealth, there are persons interested in improving the schools. We want their help in carrying forward the good work, and we promise them, in return, cordial sympathy, and such help as it may be in our power to bestow.

For the Association,

ABBY W. MAY,
President.

ANNETTE P. ROGERS,
Secretary.

BOSTON, MAY 20, 1881.

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